4-22-2019

Fun in a Kansas salt mine

Robert F. Diffendal Jr
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, rdiffendal1@unl.edu

Ecotourism on the Prairie

April Great Plains ecotourism newsletter

Ecotourism on the Prairie is a newsletter about nature tourism on the Great Plains from the **Great Plains Ecotourism Coalition** at the University of Nebraska's Center for Great Plains Studies and the **Nebraska Tourism Commission**.

HAPPY EARTH DAY!

Fun in a Kansas salt mine

By R.F. Diffendal, Jr., Emeritus Fellow, Center for Great Plains Studies, University of Nebraska, author of Great Plains Geology.

Most people probably do not know that salt deposits hundreds of feet thick lie buried beneath large parts of western Kansas, western Oklahoma and a small part of the northeastern Texas Panhandle. Native Americans and early European explorers found that where the salt deposits came near the land surface (for, example north of Hutchinson, Kansas) salt is dissolved by ground water and increases the salinity of rivers, streams, springs and ponds. This salty water was used as a salt source by these peoples.

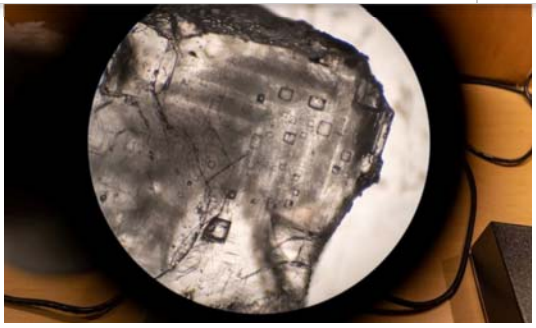
The Hutchinson Salt, a 275 million-year-old Middle Permian deposit, was discovered in an exploratory drill hole in 1887. The Carey Salt Company began mining the purer, lower part of the 325-foot-thick salt beneath South Hutchinson in 1923. The **Hutchinson Salt Company** purchased the mine in 1990 and currently processes between 500,000 and 750,000 tons of salt per year, mostly sold for use as rock salt and cattle supplements. Mining continues today, north

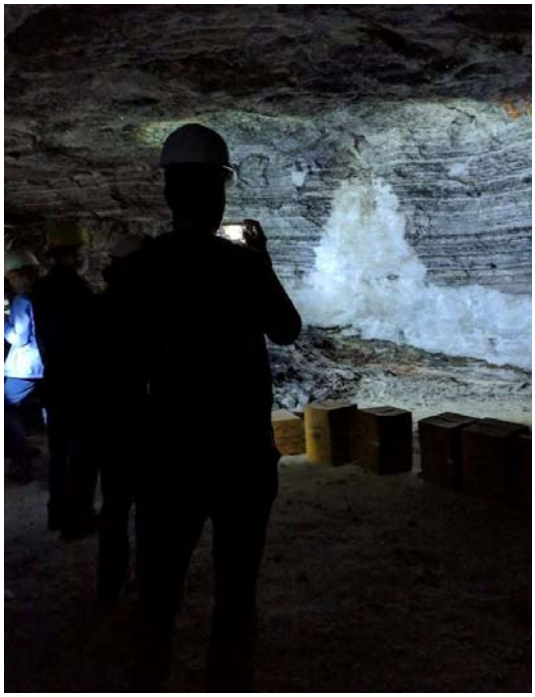
Salt Museum and to **Underground Vaults and Storage, Inc**., which uses its 1,665,000 ft^2 of leased space to store such things as documents, films, art works and other items under constant humidity of 40% and temperatures ranging from 68-73° F. Strataca has year-round tours of parts of the abandoned mine as well as a gift shop and a museum featuring mining history and equipment as well as artifacts from and information about the UV&S stored items. Open dates, times and tour costs can be found at the Strataca web site.

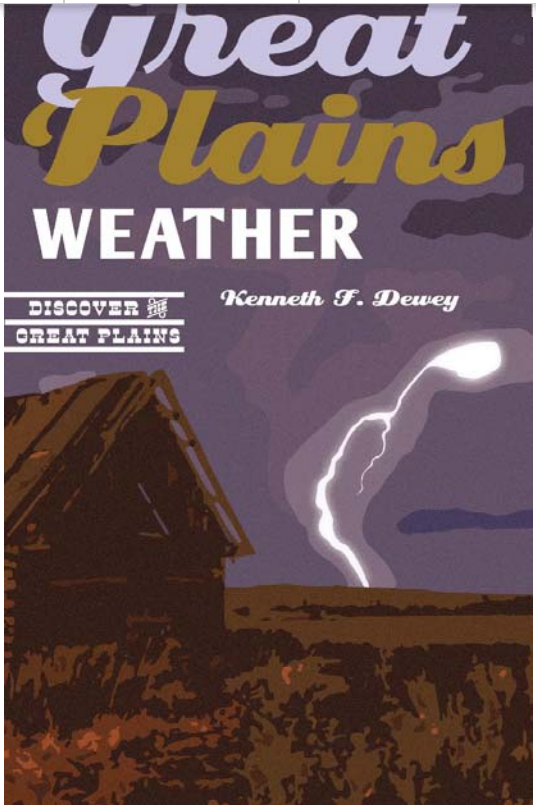
The tour, my third salt mine so far, was a lot of fun and may be the experience of a lifetime for many people who have never previously been in a mine. My group of geologists had a four-hour tour and got to see many things that the public does not. As we prepared to walk back to the lifts to take us back to the surface, we were passed by many families with children off on a Sunday afternoon adventure. The kids were having a lot of fun. One caution -- the tour is not for the claustrophobic.

Images used with this piece are by Diffendal and other participants on the field trip for geologists.


KS
Hutchinson
Hutchinson
Salt
Wichita
CO
TX
OK







Great Plains Weather

The weather of the Great Plains is extreme and highly variable, from floods to droughts, blizzards to tornadoes. In this new addition to the *Discover the Great Plains* series, Dewey explains what makes this region's climate unique by presenting a historical climatology of extreme weather events. Beginning with tornadoes, he describes the climatology of these storms and discusses memorable tornadoes of the plains. As one of the storm chasers who travels the Great Plains in the spring and summer tracking severe weather, Dewey also shares some of his experiences on the road.

Have an ecotourism story to share? **Email us** your story and we may feature it here!

THE CENTER FOR GREAT PLAINS STUDIES

Visit Nebraska